

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06

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E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAIR, EIND, UK, US, FR

SUBJECT: FRENCH CONCERN ABOUT U.S. CONCORDE DECISION

REF: BORDEAUX 0133

1. SUMMARY: TRIP REPORT BY EMBOFF JUST BACK FROM TOULOUSE AND ADJOINING AREAS FURTHER CONFIRMS HOW SENSITIVE CONCORDE ISSUE IS IN THAT IMPORTANT REGION WHERE FEELINGS ON THE SUBJECT CONTINUES RUN VERY HIGH. END SUMMARY.

2. PREFECTS, CITY OFFICIALS, LOCAL JOURNALISTS AND MAN ON STREET ALL, IN VARIOUS WAYS, MADE POINT THAT U.S. "REJECTION" OF CONCORDE WOULD BE VIEWED AS ACT OF "COMMERCIAL HOSTILITY" AND AS SUCH WOULD "NOT BE UNDERSTOOD"

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IN FRANCE, AND EVEN LESS BY POPULACE IN TOULOUSE AND

ADJOINING AREAS DIRECTLY AFFECTED BY BREAD AND BUTTER EFFECTS.

3. HARDLY ANY, EVEN AMONG BETTER-INFORMED REGIONAL AND LOCAL OFFICIALS, HAD APPRECIATION OF POLITICAL AND ECOLOGICAL REASONS MOTIVATING RESISTANCE OF US PUBLIC TO GRANTING OF CONCORDE LANDING RIGHTS. BY CONTRAST, VIRTUALLY EVERYONE CONTACTED THOUGHT ADVERSE LS DECISION WOULD REFLECT USG BUCKLING TO COMMERCIAL PRESSURES FROM US AVIATION FIRMS.

4. THESE SHARP REACTIONS ARE OBVIOUSLY EXACERBATED BY CONTINUATION OF OVERALL ECONOMIC RECESSION IN FRANCE, PARTICULARLY IN TOULOUSE AREA, WHICH IS SUFFERING FROM RELATIVELY HIGH UNEMPLOYMENT AND A GOOD DEAL OF PARTIAL UNEMPLOYMENT (INCLUDING ELECTRONICS AND AVIATION INDUSTRIES). EVEN THOUGH WE WERE TOLD, DIRECT EMPLOYMENT ON CONCORDE PROJECT HAS DROPPED FROM 4,000 TO ABOUT 1200 AT TOULOUSE, LEFT-WING POLITICAL FORCES IN AREA ARE STILL RESTRAINED. IF HOPES FOR CONCORDE LANDING RIGHTS IN US AND SIGNIFICANT PENETRATION OF US AVIATION MARKET ARE DASHED, PROBLEM IS LIKELY TO TRANSLATE ITSELF INTO MAJOR POLITICAL ISSUE IN TOULOUSE REGION, QUITE APART FROM BROADER NATIONAL RAMIFICATIONS. SOME EVEN BELIEVE THAT IT COULD SPELL DIFFERENCE IN HANDING TOULOUSE BACK TO COALITION OF LEFT IN 1976 LEGISLATIVE ELECTION. SUCH A SHIFT, LIKELY TO AFFECT OTHER RELATED AREAS AS WELL, COULD THEN HAVE BROADER ADVERSE EFFECT ON FRENCH POLITICAL SCENE.

5. MOST REASONED REACTION TO CONCORDE ISSUE WE ENCOUNTERED IN VISIT IN TOULOUSE CAME FROM REGIONAL PREFECT TONY ROCHE WHO SUGGESTED CONCORDE FAILURE WOULD BE A BLOW FOR AREA, BUT COULD BE OFFSET IN ECONOMIC, AND TO AN EXTENT IN PUBLIC RELATIONS TERMS, SHOULD THERE BE PROMPT NEW INVESTMENT, PARTICULARLY IN ELECTRONICS FIELD.

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ROCHE SAID THAT AN EFFORT WAS CURRENTLY UNDERWAY IN THIS CONNECTION TO SEE IF SUCH NEW US INVESTMENTS COULD BE STIMULATED, WHICH COULD ALSO HELP TO IMPROVE POLITICAL ATMOSPHERE.

6. COMMENT: IT IS NO SURPRISE THAT FEELINGS ARE RUNNING HIGH IN TOULOUSE, WHICH IS CENTER OF FRENCH AIRCRAFT INDUSTRY AND WHERE CONCORDE (AS WELL AS AIRBUS) ASSEMBLY LINE IS LOCATED. WHAT WAS STRIKING, HOWEVER, WAS INTENSITY OF LOCAL SENTIMENT, GENERAL INCLINATION TO VIEW SUBJECT IN SIMPLIFIED EMOTIONAL TERMS. WHILE ISSUES AND NOTABLY INTRICACIES OF USG'S PROCEDURAL HANDLING HAVE BEEN WIDELY AIRED IN METROPOLITAN FRENCH PRESS, IT ALSO STRIKING HOW MANY OTHERWISE WELL-INFORMED PERSONS IN LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TOULOUSE (AND PERHAPS OTHER) REGIONS, WERE IGNORANT OF FACTS.

7. AS FOR LOCAL ECONOMIC FALLOUT IN TOULOUSE REGION SHOULD CONCCRDE BE IN ANY WAY BANNED FROM SERVING U.S., CONCORDE ASSEMBLY LINE WOULD CLOSE DOWN ANYWAY, EVEN IF US LANDING RIGHTS WERE GRANTED, IF AFTER COMPLETION OF THE EIGHTH FRENCH CONCORDE NOW PROGRAMMED, NO NEW ORDERS ARE FORTHCOMING. ON OTHER HAND, IT SEEMS TO US THAT THE NEW INVESTMENT IN WHICH THE TOULOUSE PREFECT EXPRESSED INTEREST COULD, IN FACT, COME FROM ELECTRONICS INDUSTRY

OR RESULT FROM FRANCO-AMERICAN COOPERATION IN AIRCRAFT CONSTRUCTION, SHOULD CURRENT TALKS WITH US INDUSTRY ON POSSIBLE JOINT DEVELOPMENT OF THE MERCURE 200, FOR EXAMPLE, COME TO FRUITION. IT WOULD BE IRONIC, HOWEVER, IF INTENSITY OF NEGATIVE REACTION FOLLOWING ANY US BANNING OF CONCORDE SHOULD CAUSE SUCH COOPERATION TO GO BY BOARDS, TO DETRIMENT OF TOULOUSE ECONOMY, THE INTERESTS OF OUR OWN AEROSPACE INDUSTRY (MILITARY AS WELL AS CIVIL), AND THE VISTA OF BROADER FRANCO-AMERICAN INDUSTRIAL COOPERATION THAT A JOINT VENTURE IN AIRCRAFT CONSTRUCTION MIGHT OTHERWISE HERALD.

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